The Cleveland Museum of Art

Press Release

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SANDY WALKER: WOODBLOCK PRINTS
December 13, 1994 - March 12, 1995

Among the boldest and most powerful of contemporary works on paper, Sandy Walker's large prints exploit black-white drama, and hover between abstraction and representation. The Print Club of Cleveland's annual commission for 1994, *Wyoming Horizon*, is one of thirteen woodcuts in an exhibition of Walker's work at The Cleveland Museum of Art from December 13, 1994, through March 12, 1995. Most of the works were inspired by nature, from panoramic landscapes to dense woods, and all were executed between 1986 and 1993.

Sandy Walker is a California-based artist whose woodcut prints as well as his paintings are influenced by artists as diverse as Cézanne, Mondrian, and Jackson Pollock. Though almost always based on the landscape, his prints are persuasive as abstract rhythms and forms. Each conveys a tension between a sense of deep space and the acknowledgement that one is looking at a series of marks on a flat surface. The scale and drama of his most recent work, *Green Mansions* (eight feet high by six feet wide), makes the viewer feel surrounded by trees.

Walker's prints have a freshness and immediacy which belie the several stages of their creation. He draws directly on a wood block and then, using a straight-edged knife, cuts all the wood away from the sides of each line or area that will be printed. When finished the image appears as a network of lines and shapes standing out in relief. The surface of the block is inked and a piece of paper is placed on top. The printing is done in a press or the paper is rubbed from behind by hand. Walker favors Japanese papers because of their color, texture, and strength; he also prefers absorbent paper so that ink soaks into the fibers rather than sitting on the paper's surface. He chooses inexpensive

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plywood blocks because of their random grain and the irregular splintering of the wood as it is carved.

Walker's prints have been on view in a one-person survey of his paintings and works on paper at the Riverside (California) Museum in 1989, the important **Projects and Portfolios** 25th Annual Print Exhibition in 1989 at the Brooklyn Museum, and in the **11th British International Print Biennale** in 1990 at Bradford, England. Jane Glaubinger, curator of prints and drawings at The Cleveland Museum of Art, first viewed Walker's prints at the Brooklyn Museum exhibition, and subsequently invited him to submit a work to The Print Club of Cleveland for consideration as its annual commission for its 75th anniversary year. The result, *Wyoming Horizon*, is on view with the wood block from which it was printed.

Walker was born in Washington, DC. He graduated cum laude from Harvard College in 1964 and continued his education at the Boston University School of Fine and Applied Arts, the New York Studio School, and Columbia University, where he received his MFA and was awarded the Brevoort Fellowship. Walker's prints are in such major collections as the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the National Museum of American Art in Washington, DC.

The fully illustrated catalogue for this exhibition is also a catalogue raisonné of Walker's prints; it is available in the Museum Store for $8.

Sandy Walker: Woodblock Prints was organized by the MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In a statement appended to this release, Walker writes about his experience of the Wyoming landscape and the beginnings of his black-and-white images.

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Walker will give a public lecture at the Museum on Wednesday evening, December 14, at 7:30 pm; The Print Club of Cleveland is hosting a reception afterward.

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Sandy Walker
Artist's Statement

Between my junior and senior years in high school I found my way, through coincidence and good luck, to a summer job on the James Harlan Ranch on the Barnum Route west of Kaycee, Wyoming. That experience has remained one of the most important of my life.

I was already painting at age 16. I was attending St. Albans School in Washington, DC, where there was an excellent art program beginning in the fourth grade, taught by Dean Stambaugh. By the time I was 13, I was painting oils. During my summer at the Harlans' Ranch, I photographed with my Brownie camera, mostly in black and white. The following school year--my senior year--I painted oil paintings from the photos. Some of the work still hangs on the walls of the Harlans' ranch house.

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I had continued to visit Barnum after my summer job and had even attempted to settle in Barnum during the years of 1969-70. By 1986 I had finished college and four years of graduate school and lived the life of the artist as best I could. I had painted in many major landscape sites such as the Grand Canyon, Mount Shasta, The Grand Tetons, and Niagara Falls. But I had never been able to express my experience on the land in Wyoming that was closest to my heart and appeared most beautiful and inspiring to me.

In September of 1986 I came briefly to the Harlans' ranch to show the area to my family. The Harlans' sons, Chuck and Bob, had expanded into a new ranch about 40 miles north of Casper. They called it the Lone Bear. We went out there one typically windy day to separate the ewes and lambs just down from the mountain pasture. Though some people might regard this country as "godforsaken," I was thrilled by it. This was a land of long horizons, glorious light and rich in wildlife. The casual observer might pass by this land without a second glance. To me it was essential and vital.

The next summer I was back as the guest of Bob and Chuck and painted the first of my Lone Bear series. It was exactly the essential nature of this place--earth and sky--that connected me with my greatest needs as a painter. I wanted to paint essences, not appearances. I had approached more famous landscape sites in the same fashion--hoping to touch the archetype, to make us realize what it is that is so inspiring to us about such places.

The second summer ('88) I worked mostly at the Harlans' summer pasture on the southern end of the Bighorn mountains. There too I attempted to grasp and express the essence. For that reason I began painting in black paint on white canvas. I was trying to strip away--get down to the core. Sometimes I feel that my woodblocks have most captured this essence, these images in which I move in a burst of inspiration to the extended thought and work of carving and printing. These prints sometimes take more than a year to accomplish.

For my third summer I returned to the middle fork of Powder River and the Barnum Route. I worked all summer in a small and very rich section of the Harlan Property that they call Red Fork. I focused for a long time on one very large cottonwood tree. Again I was reaching for essences of the tree and of my methods of painting. I painted a frieze of six large canvases. The six are meant to be seen as a whole. In these paintings I am working with the arbitrariness of the whole process of painting that I love so dearly, with my own finiteness, and with the personalness of my vision. I continue to want to express the power that I feel in nature, in the land, as a part of it, and as inspired by the country I call Wyoming. Wyoming for me is not just a geographic state, it is a state of mind.

From a brochure distributed by the Nicolaysen Art Museum, Casper, Wyoming, for an exhibition of Sandy Walker's work held there July 11-August 30, 1992.

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